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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RABAT 000680

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STATE FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MO

SUBJECT: PARTY FOR PROGRESS AND SOCIALISM LEADER STRESSES
ANTI-CORRUPTION ELECTION FOCUS

Classified By: AMB Thomas T. Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Ismail Alaoui, leader of the (leftist) Party for Progress and Socialism (PPS), and Minister of Communication Benabdallah, told the Ambassador April 4 their party had an election platform heavily focused on combating corruption. The formerly communist PPS is a member of the governing coalition. Alaoui and Benabdallah complained that the Islamist PJD was highjacking their signature issue, corruption. The PPS, while not a large political force, appears primed to be an active player in the next government coalition, which they predicted will not include the Islamist PJD. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) With the backdrop of Morocco's next legislative election, Ambassador met April 4 with PPS secretary general Ismail Alaoui and Minister of Communication (and PPS executive committee member) Nabil Benabdallah to discuss preparations for September's ballot as well party plans to increase voter participation. The PPS, a relatively left pro-throne party with a Communist pedigree, practices a significant degree of pragmatism and is one of the more sophisticated political parties in Morocco.

Preparing An Anti-Corruption Focused Campaign

¶3. (C) PPS leader Alaoui said his party's campaign platform will center on three primary pillars: combating corruption, creating jobs, and improving living conditions; but will be heavily tilted towards anti-corruption themes. Alaoui underscored that corruption exist at all levels of society. However, he said this was not the case at the Minister level (which drew some chuckles from Benabdallah), and explained police and judicial courts are where the two main problems lie. He said judicial corruption was worse; the Ambassador disagreed, saying low-level police corruption affected the group that could afford it the least - the very poorest Moroccans. PPS leaders agreed corruption can not be solved in one fell swoop. The party will concentrate anti-corruption efforts on particular sectors where it can have a positive impact. Small-scale corruption may be acceptable in the short-term, explained Benabdallah, but corruption within critical institutions, such as the judiciary, is "unacceptable" and threatens the stability of Morocco.

Election Date May Hurt Voter Turnout

¶4. (C) Alaoui lamented the government's decision to hold

elections in early September, rather than in July. Alaoui and Benabdallah maintained that the September date, coinciding with the end of summer vacations and the beginning of the school year and Ramadan, will negatively effect turnout. Nonetheless, he assured the Ambassador the PPS is actively working on its strategy to engage and mobilize youth, taking into account these extenuating factors.

15. (C) PPS leaders suggested that the large community of Moroccans citizens living abroad (MREs) would play a role in the upcoming election. Benabdallah, however, indicated that because of practical impediments, only a small number of MREs of voting age, estimated at roughly two million, will take part in September's election. MREs must physically appear in their district of registration on Election Day in order to vote, he explained. Benabdallah speculated that a few well-organized MRE communities willing to make the trip could skew certain districts, but will not have a noticeable impact on the overall results (alluding to the PJD's perceived strength among certain MRE communities). (Note: Moroccan TV is carrying advertising spots aimed at MREs urging them to vote at their embassies. End Note.)

PJD Hijacking Corruption Issue

16. (C) Turning to the Islamist Party for Justice and Development (PJD), Benabdallah said "just because you have a beard does not mean you can lecture us" on corruption, referring to the PPS's long track record on fighting corruption. Despite their rhetoric, the PJD turns a blind eye on pervasive contraband and drug black markets, which Benabdallah claimed has profited the PJD and is managed by "Islamists with beards." The PPS plans to awaken the population to this reality, he said.

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17. (C) Benabdallah said, "we are not scared of the PJD," but admitted that the PJD's anticipated gains could inject a "political shock" into Moroccan politics. He cautioned that the real PJD is not what appears on the surface. Benabdallah recalled an incident where PJD parliamentarians voted against several Palace proposed laws, equating to "a sort of declaration of war," he said.

Ruling Majority Unlikely to Change

18. (C) Benabdallah predicted that the current ruling government majority (which includes the USFP, Istiqlal, UMP, RNI, and PPS) would remain in power following September's ballot. He excluded the possibility of the PPS joining a coalition with the PJD - citing irreconcilable ideological differences. He expected the King to name the next Prime Minister, noting the nomination will reveal the true orientation of the next government.

Comment

19. (C) The PPS is not a political heavyweight, with only 22 of 325 seats in parliament's lower house and just 1 minister. In contrast to their Coalition partners (USFP and Istiqlal), the PPS appears well-prepared and focused on September's electoral race. The party has targeted campaign issues that have traction with a large number of voters, and seems well on its way to developing a comprehensive election strategy. Nevertheless, we believe the PPS will not gain many seats, if it manages to hold on to what it has. It will almost certainly opt again to join a coalition as it wants to be a player in the next government. End Comment.

RILEY